

# Commissioner's Office

Former State Senator, Leonard M. Blackham, was appointed Commissioner of Agriculture and Food in January following the retirement of Commissioner Cary G. Peterson. Commissioner Blackham is a successful turkey farmer and lifelong resident of Sanpete County. His appointment by newly elected Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., signaled renewed efforts to emphasize the revitalization of rural Utah. Commissioner Blackham quickly moved to reorganize the Department by re-establishing a separate division of Marketing whose focus is to promote Utah-grown agricultural products and thus Utah's rural producers. The division's first major campaign promoted the "Utah's Own" theme where shoppers can quickly identify local produce by the distinctive Utah's Own logo.

The department and its seven divisions employ numerous programs to support the following goals:

- To ensure a safe, wholesome and sustainable food supply.
- Improve water, soil and air quality to help conserve resources and enhance production.
- Respect and serve our customers and employees. Enhance the economic vitality of our agricultural communities.

The department redesigned its official seal. The logo now simply depicts a sprouting seed that signifies the miracle of life and agriculture. The design includes the state's borders with the department's initials, U-D-A-F. The logo will soon be incorporated into official correspondence, as well as the department's internet home page and publications.



Commissioner Blackham is making three programs a priority: Marketing, Conservation and Invasive Noxious Weeds.

The Marketing division is working to stimulate Utah's rural economy. Making farming profitable is the best way to preserve farmland and protect our rural quality of life. The department's new "Utah's Own" campaign encourages Utahns to seek out and purchase Utah-grown products.

In the area of conservation, Commissioner Blackham is expanding support for livestock grazing on private and public lands. The ecological and economic benefits of grazing are numerous. He is stressing a public-private partnership approach with groups such as the Utah Association of Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Utah Department

of Natural Resources and the Bureau of Land Management. This partnership will help rehabilitate rangelands.

The commissioner's third priority is limiting or halting the spread of noxious weeds in the state. These invasive plant species are doing considerable harm to the rangeland and the Department will be accelerating its efforts to slow and even halt the spread of these weeds.

The prevention of the spread of West Nile Virus (WNV) to horses and humans is one of the goals of the Division of Plant Industry and the Division of Animal Industry. The department now has an ongoing program that will grant more than \$300,000 to counties to expand or create new mosquito abatement districts in an effort to increase mosquito spraying and WNV education.

The threat of agriterrorism and the possible introduction of a foreign animal disease or pest into the United States make biosecurity a top priority for the department and its seven divisions.

As a result of the discovery of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), commonly known as mad cow disease, in the US, the Division of Animal Industry took part in a national program that tested certain cattle for the disease. Utah tested more than 4,600 cattle. No BSE was detected in Utah. The division also strictly enforces the ban on feeding meat and bone meal to ruminants, which is an important safeguard in the prevention of the spread of BSE.

Commissioner Blackham initiated a series of town meetings across the state called "Open Forum with the Commissioner." The forums are designed to allow Utah farmers and ranchers to meet personally with the commissioner to discuss agricultural issues. The first meetings were held in Duchesne, Uintah, Duchesne, Grand, San Juan, Box Elder, Iron, and Wasatch Counties.

(right) Visitors at one of the Commissioner's Open Forums asked questions about : soil conservation programs, water releases from Flaming Gorge Reservoir, flooding, West Nile virus protection, BSE and live cattle imports from Canada, and other topics.



Kyle R. Stephens  
Deputy Commissioner



The Department assisted the Utah Department of Environmental Quality in the creation of an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that will help poultry, swine and dairy livestock owners meet new federal clean air requirements. The agreement, known as the Utah Clean Air Strategy, will work to monitor and reduce emissions from farms while limiting burdensome regulations that threaten ranchers' viability.

In an effort to bolster the economic vitality of rural Utah, the department is undertaking a public education program designed to promote the wide ranging benefits of livestock grazing. Various reports and studies confirm that properly managed grazing practices improve watersheds, stimulate a variety of plant species, control soil erosion, and create natural fire breaks on rangeland and other areas. Grazing also makes use of one of Utah's largest natural resources, its open rangelands. Livestock that graze on public and private lands is viewed by many as a scenic benefit to their outdoor experience.

The department is working to ensure long term stability and competency in its workforce by updating the compensation offered its employees. A strategy is in place that will help eliminate wasteful employee turnover where valuable resources are spent on the training of personnel who eventually take those skills to higher paying positions at other government agencies.

#### **From drought to flooding in a few short months**

Following six consecutive years of drought, Utah was inundated with above average rain and snowfall in 2004 - 2005. Utah's major river drainages reported precipitation amounts ranging from 108 to 211 percent of normal. The Virgin River drainage recorded the highest percent at 211. Subsequent flooding caused millions of dollars in damage to farmland and personal property. Stream erosion was significant in several areas, prompting state and federal disaster declarations.



*Cropland flooding along the Sevier R.*

#### **Public Information Office**

The office of Public Information is an important link between the public, industry, employees, and other state agencies. The office publishes various brochures, articles and newsletters as well as creates displays and computer presentations. The office also writes news releases and serves as spokesperson for the department.

During the past year, the office created public awareness campaigns for many of the department's activities such as: Utah's Own/Farmers Markets, homeland security and BSE prevention, West Nile Virus protection for horse owners, flood assistance programs, Mormon cricket and grasshopper control and the Registration Program for the Division of Regulatory Services.

The Public Information Office also interacts with local schools, offering students lessons on the connection between the farm and our food. A complete list of Department services is available at: <http://ag.utah.gov/services.html>.

The underlined text throughout this annual report represent Internet links available on the CD ROM version of this document..

#### **Agriculture Mediation Program**

The department continues to provide services to the agriculture community through its USDA Certified Mediation Program. The program assists farmers and ranchers who face adverse actions in connection with USDA programs. Utah is one of 33 certified programs and has administered this program since 1988. Utah farmers and ranches who rely on the Certified State Agriculture Mediation Program to help them through difficult economic times have had that valuable service extended after the passage of the Agriculture Mediation Bill. The program helps farmers and ranchers seek confidential advice and counsel to address loan problems and disputes before they grow to be too much for the producer to handle. The legislation will continue to authorize funding of the Certified State Agriculture Mediation Program for five years. Mediation provides a neutral, confidential forum to discuss complex issues and build strong working relationships with producers, their lenders and government agencies.

#### **Agriculture in the Classroom**

The mission of Utah is to increase agricultural literacy in Utah by developing a program that improves student awareness about agriculture and instills in students an appreciation for our food and fiber system. This program is necessary because agriculture affects our quality of life and our environment.

The AITC program receives funds from private donors, state funding sources, and grants. These funds are leveraged to meet the programs mission through teacher training, and classroom materials that effectively and efficiently meet the need to increase agricultural literacy.